

Golden Temple: Plea for World Heritage Status

The possibility of the Golden Temple being granted the Unesco World Heritage Site status has triggered an interest among world tour operators. A large portion of the 220-member group in the inaugural non-stop tourist chartered flight that landed at Raja Sansi international airport in Amritsar in October consisted of international tour operators who were to explore the possibility of more flights before the Unesco bestows world heritage status on the Golden Temple.

The passengers alighting from the Boeing 757 ER of Fly Jet were warmly welcomed. As many as 19 such flights have already been booked, indicating that more than 45,00 British nationals and NRIs may visit the holy city in the next six months. The non-stop flight takes seven hours and 38 minutes, with no time wasted on transit and refueling as in regular flights.

Enormous demand for the most economical tourist chartered flight has posed a challenge to leading airlines operating from Europe and the UK to India. The fact that the Indian nationals are not permitted by the GOI to use the tourist chartered flights has not dampened the spirits of the promoters of the UK group, which has taken the initiative to start the chartered flights. Sources in the tourism industry feel north India has enough tourism potential. – SNS.

Seminar on problems of Sikh educational institutions in Delhi

Outside Punjab, the largest Sikh population is concentrated in Delhi, and is looking at developments taking place in its Institutions. This being so, the Sikh educational institutions located in Delhi are not only likely to be largest in number but should also be the best of their kind.

Education is not only a part of Sikh ethics as an essential for right belief and enlightenment but also an absolute necessity for self-confidence, empowerment and survival with dignity, especially for minority like the Sikhs in a highly competitive society. In the present age of communication revolution, fast technological development and ever increasing competition in all professions, education no more means just attending any school and becoming literate in whatever way it is available. What is required is high quality, a modern, professional and balanced system of education which can provide respectable livelihood. While, at the same time it, inculcates Sikh traditions, values, culture and language in them.

It is a matter of regret that while the process of establishing Sikh educational institutions started by the Singh Sabha Movement and the Chief Khalsa Dewan continues, the standard, credibility and reputation of these institutions has been deteriorating day by day, to the extent that these have become schools of the last resort. The main reason for this is total and unabashed managerial control and complete politicisation of these schools. There is absolute lack of professionally skilled, purposeful and experienced management bereft of foresight and vision.

Prior to the last election for the DSGMC, the Shiromani Akali Dal committed itself to the setting up of Educational Council comprising of eminent educationist and experienced administrators. This commitment remains unfulfilled by and large. Recently, nominal Education Council was established. The majority of its members are members of the DSGMC and the Council is only advisory in character. Thus the

management, policy formulation and decision making with regard to governance and running of schools continues to be under the control of the DSGMC office bearers. In this background, we urge upon the DSGMC and the Shiromani Akali Dal to take the effective measures without any further loss of time. We also urge upon the Sikh Community to mobilize itself in favour of the same. - **The Sikh Forum**, 86, Hemkunt Colony, New Delhi 110 048.

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Canadian Consulate in Punjab

Chandigarh witnessed a unique Diwali weekend. Last October, the Canadian Prime Minister visited the city with his huge entourage. The purpose of this high profile visit was to inaugurate the full fledged office of the Canadian Consulate-General at Chandigarh which will become operational in April next year. The Canadian High Commission already has an active trade and visa office in Chandigarh.

More importantly, the Prime Minister's visit with his open heartedness reflected a spirit to facilitate easier accessibility in issuing visas to the people residing in Punjab and those who have relatives settled as landed immigrants in Canada. The Prime Minister also said that the office of the Consulate-General would improve the flow of people by enhancing immigration and visa services. The Prime Minister disclosed in his inaugural address that India was the second largest country of immigrants to Canada, and that in the year 2001, 11 percent of all new residents were Indian nationals.

On the commercial side of things, this significant visit witnessed signing of MOUs between Punjab government organisations and their Canadian counterparts both in the public sector and the private sector. Prime Minister Jean Chretien was accompanied by Herb Dhaliwal, the national resources minister of his government.

The Canadian delegation was accompanied by NRIs settled in Canada. Mr. Bhupinder Singh Liddar, Canada's first consul-general designate in Chandigarh was also present. Ms. Lucile Edwards, designate Canadian High commissioner witnessed the signing of the MOUs. The Royal Canadian mounted police was on red alert in impeccable red dresses in the lush green lawns. The crowds wondered as to how they would be coping up in the sunshine in their heavy dresses, being used to severe minus temperatures.

The British already have relied on administrative outsourcing through visa facilitation centres in Chandigarh and Jalandhar, which became operational in February earlier this year. It is time that some major member of the Schengen states did some serious introspection by having a presence in Paris of Punjab, i.e. the city beautiful Chandigarh.

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Dr. Surjit Kaur (USA) Honoured

Eminent educator and counsellor, Dr. Surjit Kaur has been honoured with the Vision-in-America Award, 2003 by the International Channel Networks (VIA) for her "outstanding community service" and contributions in Fairfax Country. Humanist and author of several books, including her latest "*Amongst the Sikhs: Reaching for the*

Stars” [Roli Books] in collaboration with Sr. Khushwant Singh, Dr. Surjit Kaur, who has a Doctorate from Washington State University, is the first Sikh (and the second Indian) to be so honoured. As part of the VIA Award, International Channel Networks have made a US\$ 500 donation to Guru Gobind Singh Foundation, an organisation of her choice. The event is part of the “**We the People**” citizenship campaign which celebrates the extraordinary experience of becoming an American citizen and accords recognition to the contribution of immigrants to the United States.

Our hearty felicitations to the distinguished social scientist.

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SGPC okays Pak panel

Leader of the SGPC jatha to Pakistan, Mr Balkar Singh, said last November that the SGPC has recognised the Pakistan Sikh Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee on the condition that it would be headed by a Sikh and that the PSGPC accepts the SGPC’s long-standing demand to implement *maryada* (Sikh code of conduct) as recognised by the SGPC and Akal Takht at all 174 Sikh shrines in Pakistan.

Dr Singh said the PSGPC had asked him to provide them the draft of the *maryada* so that it could be implemented there without further delay. The PSGPC had agreed in principle for carrying out *kar seva* at Sikh shrines in Pakistan as per Sikh traditions. Dr Singh said the PSGPC had also accepted the demand of allowing Granthis from India for the restoration of *maryada* there.

Dr Singh said he had exchanged *siropas* with Mr Sham Singh, co-chairman of PSGPC, at the main function held at Gurdwara Nankana Sahib on Nov. 8 *Gurpurab*. He said the stand of Mr Gurcharan Singh Tohra, the SGPC chief, had been clear from day one that Pakistan being a sovereign country could form a committee to run the affairs of gurdwaras in that country. However, it was the duty of the PSGPC to ensure *maryada* at all Gurdwaras.

[Courtesy: *The Statesman*]